

Building Healthy Relationships Pt 1

Relationship with your God

* Suppose you are in a rubber raft with a friend. You're approaching an island. The raft is leaking, and you are in sight of land. In the raft you have a set of signal flares, a week's supply of canned food for one, and a five gallon container of water. You must throw something out of the raft if you are going to make it to the island. Which one would you chose?

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We all have different priorities, and if your priority was survival you might have chosen to lose the friend (unless you want to give the Christian answer). The truth is friendships are easily forfeited for the priorities in our lives. * We fail to meet with friends and family because of work commitments, something good on TV, apathy, the person said something you didn't like last time, you are scared you may have offended them last time.

Relationships are both beautiful, and can also often be painful. We would sooner not relate when it is going to cost us something, but will relate when we are going to get something out of the relationship.

Despite all the things that would deter us from entering a relationship, or maintaining one, Jesus' view is that relationships are the most important thing. If you want to build something that will last well after you then all of us can build a relationship that has meant something to someone and brought about change in their life. I was reading Becky and Rays Facebook page the other day and it was touching to see the posts from the children of their last church "Thankyou U have so changed my life! Ill miss u loads but c u in the summer".

That's what relationships should do – change peoples lives, and cause a yearning to be back together again. That is precious. Relationships have been important from day one and God in that complex relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit demonstrate that to love you must be in relationship, and it is self giving to another, and it will cost. Only a God who in His immense love for His creation and all mankind could in the form of His Son, give His life to bring us back into relationship with Him.

Sin is an assault on relationships. Sin, has the middle letter I. Every time I becomes supreme above our consideration of God and our neighbours, relationships are broken. From that point on it costs something to repair the relationship, God through Jesus made the sacrifice, paid the price, that enables us to come back into relationship with a holy, perfect God. The price we pay is to accept our mistake, to ask His forgiveness and to turn our lives back over to living in a relationship which serves Him.

A similar thing is true of all our relationships, when events become focussed on ourselves and it hurts and damages a relationship with somebody else, we have to make amends and work at putting things right. This provides the life of Shalom, the life of peace, a life of completeness, sacrificial living to the purposes of God, and to the benefit of others.

I am not saying you cannot enjoy life, or that God never intended you to be an individual. On the contrary He made you so that others could help you enjoy all that God intended for you as an individual, and He made you so that you can help others enjoy all that God intended for them.

Lets read the passage which tells us how important relationships are too Jesus.

* Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30

Matthew 22:23-40

That same day, Sadducees approached him. This is the party that denies any possibility of resurrection. 24 They asked, "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies childless, his brother is obligated to marry his widow and get her with child. 25 Here's a case where there were seven brothers. The first brother married and died, leaving no child, and his wife passed to his brother. 26 The second brother also left her childless, then the third — and on and on, all seven. 27 Eventually the wife died. 28 Now here's our question: At the resurrection, whose wife is she? She was a wife to each of them." 29 Jesus answered, "You're off base on two counts: You don't know your Bibles, and you don't know how God works. 30 At the resurrection we're beyond marriage. As with the angels, all our ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God. 31 And regarding your speculation on whether the dead are raised or not, don't you read your Bibles? The grammar is clear: God says, 32 'I am — not was — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' The living God defines himself not as the God of dead men, but of the living." 33 Hearing this exchange the crowd was much impressed. 34 When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. 35 One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: 36 "Teacher, which command in God's Law is the most important?" 37 Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' 38 This is the most important, the first on any list. 39 But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' 40 These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them."

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In Matthews account Jesus is answering a sincere question after courteously responding to questions about paying taxes, and the resurrection which were designed to trick Him so that they could make accusations against Him the Pharisees and the Saduccees.

Jesus was not always pleasant in His responses to people, He was direct, truthful and challenging. His desire was always for a relationship to be restored between the person and His Father.

In the passage the question which is the greatest commandment comes from the SCRIBES an expert in the law a lawyer (nomikos)

Jesus takes this opportunity to summarize the Torah, all 613 rules for quality living, the best relational, hygiene guidance given before psychology and science determined what would be good for us.

The 613 rules were an expansion of Gods guidance for relationships within community and faith, known as the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments consist of four commandments that guide us in relationship to God, and the remaining six deal with healthy relationships in the family and community. They originally formed the basis of many legal systems including our own and that of the USA. Today these guidelines are considered by many as archaic, and there is pressure to accept that there are no absolute guidelines for life.

Whatever, society accepts as believers in God our natural conscience, and the Spirit within us, leads us to accept that the guidelines of the Decalogue, 10 commandments, and much of the Torah, are good common sense guidelines for healthy relationships in faith, family and community.

However, as the NT writers tell us that the law provided a mirror to show us where we fail to meet the perfect standards that God has provided. The law in itself does not set us free, in fact trying to keep the law in our own strength puts us in bondage and guilt. Jesus provided a new way, by the life of the Holy Spirit living within us empowers us through our love of God to live lives that meet Gods standards for healthy relationships.

This morning I want to begin our examination of building a healthy relationship with God. The beginning of the 10 commandments reminds us that the Israelites were bought of bondage by the grace and mercy of God. It was God who saved them from their oppressors and delivered them into a better life. Basically God was saying these guidelines I am providing you with will not save you, you are already saved, these guidelines are to help you have a healthy, prosperous, and blessed life in the freedom I am giving you.

He starts by telling the people to have no other gods, so many things in our lives can take the place of God. The TV god in the corner of our rooms which is worshipped more hours than we give to Him. The retail god. The mobile phone gods which demand our instant attention. The car god, our favourite football team, our personal addictions or habits can all become gods in our lives.

So the 10 commandments, the 613 guidelines of the Torah, are captured in the first part of the summary Jesus gave – You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart

The Jews embedded the guidelines in their children from the age of 6 as I described last week. They started school with their hands and slates being covered in honey and they were taught to learn by heart all of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. To learn them, to love them (passion – Message), to explain them, and to consider them as the foundations of life (mind NJKV, intelligence Message).

The ultimate aim for boys graduating through the intense education system was to become a disciple of a rabbi, and then to become a rabbi themselves. Their quest to love the Lord their God was to use all their intelligence (mind) to help them understand God's preferred lifestyle by communicating and asking in Him how to understand (prayer) and to live out, love God, with their bodies by imitating their rabbi who had learnt the ways of the Torah.

God, as we have discovered in our study of the Tabernacle, is a God of imagery. He knows many of us need pictures to reveal things to us, and to help us remember facts. He is a God of imagery and props for our benefit.

One of the props, that is part of Jewish culture is that of the prayer shawl. As part of their loving God they engaged in a continuous dialogue with Him covered by a reminder of the Torah.

On the prayer shawl there are

* Numbers 15:39-40 He commands them to put on the corner of your garments. Tassels to remind them of the commandments - Tzitzit – tassels – 5 knots in each tassel to remind them of the five books of the Torah. 613 strands of thread to remind them of all the laws contained in the Torah.

The tassels are on the ends of your kaneh – they will remind you of how you should live.

As they followed their rabbi and copied (imitated) all that he did, they would pray, communicate with God, about every aspect of their lives, blessing God.

The prayer shawl, the kanough – also means wings – Gods wings are places of shelter –

* Malachi 4:2 – But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will have healing in His wings” – ie there will be healing in the prayer shawl of the Messiah
Somebody in the crowd believes the passage of Malachi and knows I am the Messiah – that is why He stopped and asked who touched Me * Mark 5:27. (* Matt 14:36 many touched the hem of His garment and were healed”

Fold your hands this is your prayer closet. Not a broom cupboard. It was a place of meditation on the precepts, the guidelines, the laws of God and a time for intimate communication with God, where you shut yourself away from the distractions around you and talk to God about everything.

So fixed were the rabbis’ disciples on loving the Lord their God with all of their intelligence, passion and prayer (mind, body and soul) they did everything possible to build a healthy relationship with God by copying the rabbi who had chosen them, and counted them as having potential too to become a rabbi. They literally lived in the dust of their rabbis teachings and activities.

Paul in His letter to the Philippians encourages us to think on **WHATEVER** *
Rather than just rules and regulations, He tells us we enter into peace, by concentrating on good things and certainty.

As we mentioned last week Jesus our rabbi, chooses His disciples and thankfully He does not look on our success in learning His words, He looks on our heart and our desire to follow Him.

When He sees a heart, a passion, a willingness to have faith in Him, a desire to believe in His teachings, a willingness to believe that He is the Son of God, He calls out

Come follow Me – Lech Hakari

In Jewish culture to hear those words was a high honour. For a rabbi to say lech hakari was like receiving a 1st Masters Degree and being publicly proclaimed as worthy of the best job in the world.

Jesus went and said those words to fisherman, tax collectors, terrorists (zealots), prostitutes, lepers, teachers, women – Come follow Me – He is still shouting those words from the shoreline of heaven to individuals He sees in the midst of their daily lives who have a hope for something better – Come follow Me

Upon hearing those words Jesus’ disciples in the NT left everything, their jobs (nets, oney bags), their communities, their families. That is what a disciple of a rabbi did, they left what they were doing and where they had grown up and lived with their teacher.

You will have heard me talk about Zebedee in the past, pondering his response to his CEO fisherman Peter, and his sons James and John deserting the profitable family business. If it happened today that you were a key figure in the business and you felt Jesus was asking you to do something different and to leave the lucrative job, and risk the companies success as well as yours, there would be attempts to persuade you otherwise. Attempts that may well succeed, more money, more perks from the boss, family pressures, the wife “How will we survive without your current salary”, the kids “Will that mean a cut in my pocket money”, the parents “Don’t be so stupid we paid for your upbringing and education so you can succeed”, yourself “Life is so comfortable at the moment even if I do moan about the boss”

Instead in Jewish culture Zebedee would probably be strutting down the street saying “My boys have left me you know?” hoping for a concerned question of “Why”, “What you going to do”, “How will you survive”, “Can I buy your boat” just for the opportunity to proudly boast, putting his fingers under his braces and say “No my boys are not with me anymore. They have been chosen to be a disciple of the rabbi.” Such pride and such a statement would get exclamations of amazement “Your boys, a rabbi, who would ever believe it, fishermen being covered in the dust of a rabbi. You must be so proud of them Zebedee.”

Remember Jesus said * “You did not chose Me I chose you” John 15:16 not about Jesus’ stand on Calvinism. Its about Jesus saying you can become like Me as your rabbi Lech hakari – come follow Me – you will leave everything and follow your rabbi if He had chosen you as a Harvard potential rabbi

When you hear that voice, feel that stirring in your heart, when your heart races and you sense God is calling you to follow His Son, He has chosen you to be covered in His dust, to learn from Him, to be empowered by Him, and most of all its that incredible statement “Son, I have chosen you, because I know you can become like ME”. Now that has got to be a wow. Jesus has called you because He knows you can become just like Him, everything He has done, and does you can do. What a relationship He wants you to enter into? WOW

When Peter asks the Lord from the boat as He sees what appears to be Jesus approaching him “Lord if that’s you, call me to you” He was saying if that is truly my rabbi, then I can do everything He does and I can walk on the water as well. The water to a Jew, particularly lakes represented the abyss the place of the departed, and to see Jesus walking ontop of the abysss had incredible spiritual significance. Likewise, when Peter steps out onto the abyss, he is saying if Jesus can stand upon the covering of the abyss, then so can I, He is my rabbi.

So what is your response to being invited into this incredible relationship with Jesus?

Are you ready to do everything He did? Are you ready to love Him with ALL of your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your strength, ALL your mind?

He knows you can do it. He has chosen you. Accept the invite, enter into the relationship, accept the fact that in yourself you could never live up to His standards or achieve what Jesus did, but with Him by His Spirit inside you, you can. It may take time. Relationships are built by spending time, quality time, with the person you have chosen to enter into relationship with. To learn His ways, is like learning any lesson, it takes time, but both of you have eternity, progress on this earth will depend upon how committed you are to this relationship.